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Bush foreign aid budget called way too low Sept. 11 attacks show poor nations need more, aid groups say

Edward Epstein, Chronicle Washington Bureau

Washington -- President Bush's proposed State Department budget for foreign aid is coming under attack by aid organizations and a prominent Bay Area congressman who say they expected more to meet the goals of the war on terrorism.

The disappointment among a coalition of 160 international aid groups and Rep. Tom Lantos, D-San Mateo, is all the greater because Bush and other administration leaders have said regularly since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks that the government planned to do more to combat poverty and promote democracy in lands that breed hopelessness and terrorists.

"We have a great opportunity during the time of war to lead the world toward the values that will bring lasting peace," Bush said in his State of the Union address.

The administration proposes a 3.6 percent budget increase to \$13.88 billion for the State Department, including a \$747 million boost in international aid spending. However, aid groups say the biggest increase would go to foreign military financing, which is set to rise \$457 million, to \$4.1 billion.

In seven core aid categories, devoted to things like basic education and health programs, help for women and children, disaster relief and promotion of democracy, spending would hit \$4 billion, up from the current \$235 million.

"The rhetoric does not match the reality," said Mary McClymont, president of InterAction, the umbrella group of 160 overseas aid groups. The coalition, which for years has been decrying

Wednesday, February 13, 2002

San Francisco Chronicle
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what it says is the chronically low level of U.S. foreign aid spending, called yesterday for spending in the seven categories to double in the next five years. "The eyes of the American people opened wider after Sept. 11. . . . They have begun to understand that their own safety and security may be linked to places like Afghanistan," she said.

While surveys regularly show the public thinks that about 20 percent of federal spending goes for foreign aid, the actual figure is less than 1 percent.

Denmark leads the world in per person aid spending, with 1 percent of its gross domestic product being spent to help poor countries. The United States spends just 0.1 percent. However, in terms of the number of actual dollars spent, the United States is No. 2, trailing only Japan.

According to Lantos, the ranking Democrat on the House International Relations Committee who is a leading hawk in the war against terrorism, Bush's budget actually cuts the State Department's spending, when post-Sept. 11 emergency appropriations are included. "I'm concerned because we need not only smart bombs, but also smart diplomacy," he said.

"I find it particularly disappointing that we are cutting spending for international broadcasting and public diplomacy," said Lantos, who helped push for creation of Radio Free Afghanistan, a new broadcast service that Congress wants but the president hasn't included in his budget.

"The relative magnitude that we spend on defense and on development assistance and public diplomacy are in different universes," he said.

Secretary of State Colin Powell defended his budget yesterday before the Senate Budget Committee.

"I wish that it was twice as much, three times as much, four times as much, " he said.

But Powell said he recognized that even in a

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faltering economy and facing a budget deficit, the president felt obliged to give big increases to the Pentagon, which is projected to get \$47 billion more, and homeland security programs.

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"Recognizing the important needs that the Defense Department has and the new need for homeland security, I am rather pleased that we are still able to get a real increase in our budget for this year as well," he added.



Powell, the former general and Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman, told the committee the U.S. military's shield for its allies should also be considered in the foreign aid debate.

"The fact that we provide defense for the free world I think should also be taken into account," he said. "We spend more on defense than anyone else, and it is behind that screen of security that we provide for the civilized world that we are able to do the kinds of development activities that I talk about in my budget."

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